

Wisdom and Philosophy – Collection

Biography

Reference: <http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/biography/>

Cormac McCarthy was born in Rhode Island on July 20, 1933. He is the third of six children (the eldest son) born to Charles Joseph and Gladys Christina McGrail McCarthy (he has two brothers and three sisters). Originally named Charles (after his father), he renamed himself Cormac after the Irish King (another source says that McCarthy's family was responsible for legally changing his name to the Gaelic equivalent of "son of Charles").

In 1937, when he was four, the family moved to Knoxville, and his father became a lawyer for the Tennessee Valley Authority (legal staff 1934-67; chief counsel 1958-67). Cormac was raised Roman Catholic. He attended Catholic High School in Knoxville, then went to the University of Tennessee in 1951-52. His major: liberal arts. McCarthy joined the U.S. Air Force in 1953; he served four years, spending two of them stationed in Alaska, where he hosted a radio show.

From 1957-59, McCarthy returned to the university, where he published two stories, "A Drowning Incident" and "Wake for Susan" in the student literary magazine, *The Phoenix*, calling himself C. J. McCarthy, Jr. While at the university, he won the Ingram-Merrill Award for creative writing in 1959 and 1960.

McCarthy left the university again, this time for good. He went to Chicago, where he worked, apparently as an auto mechanic, while writing his first novel. He later married Lee Holleman, who had been a student at the University of Tennessee, and the couple settled in Sevier County, Tennessee. They had one son, Cullen. Some time later, their marriage ended. (Lee McCarthy is the author of several books of poetry, including *Desire's Door*.)

Here's a passage from "Blood Meridian" to get a sense of Cormac McCarthy's writing.

"With darkness one soul rose wondrously from among the new slain dead and stole away in the midnight. The ground where he'd lain was soaked with blood and with urine from the voided bladders of the animals and he went forth stained and stinking like some reeking issue of the incarnate dam of war herself....He made his way among the pale and dismembered, among the sprawled and legflung horses, and he took a reckoning by the stars and set off South afoot. The night wore a thousand shapes out there in the brush and he kept his eyes to the ground ahead. Starlight and waning moon made a faint shadow of his wanderings on the dark of the desert and all along the ridges the wolves were howling and moving north toward the slaughter."

Cormac McCarthy, who lives in Texas and mostly avoids the press, isn't intimidated by much, suffering least of all. "Creative work is often driven by pain. It may be that if you don't have something in the back of your head driving you nuts, you may not do anything," he [told the Wall Street Journal](#) in 2009

And death? It doesn't seem to worry him. "Your future gets shorter and you recognize that," he said. "Anything that doesn't take years of your life and drive you to suicide hardly seems worth doing."

The good news, of course, is that McCarthy is not dead, because he is too tough to die. And, if you think like the author, then even death can't kill him. As he wrote in his semi-autobiographical 1979 novel "Suttree": "How surely are the dead beyond death. Death is what the living carry with them. A state of dread, like some uncanny foretaste of a bitter memory. But the dead do not remember and nothingness is not a curse. Far from it."

And how about something from Christopher Hitchens ...

Biography

Reference: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3956.Christopher_Hitchens

"Owners of dogs will have noticed that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they will think you are god. Whereas owners of cats are compelled to realize that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they draw the conclusion that *they* are gods."

— Christopher Hitchens, [The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever](#)

"Everybody does have a book in them, but in most cases that's where it should stay."

— Christopher Hitchens

"Beware the irrational, however seductive. Shun the 'transcendent' and all who invite you to subordinate or annihilate yourself. Distrust compassion; prefer dignity for yourself and others. Don't be afraid to be thought arrogant or selfish. Picture all experts as if they were mammals. Never be a spectator of unfairness or stupidity. Seek out argument and disputation for their own sake; the grave will supply plenty of time for silence. Suspect your own motives, and all excuses. Do not live for others any more than you would expect others to live for you."

— Christopher Hitchens, [Letters to a Young Contrarian](#)

"Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it."

— Christopher Hitchens, [god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything](#)

"We keep on being told that religion, whatever its imperfections, at least instills morality. On every side, there is conclusive evidence that the contrary is the case and that faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid."

— Christopher Hitchens

"What is it you most dislike? Stupidity, especially in its nastiest forms of racism and superstition."

— Christopher Hitchens, [Hitch-22: A Memoir](#)

"What do you most value in your friends?
Their continued existence."

— Christopher Hitchens, [Hitch-22: A Memoir](#)

"About once or twice every month I engage in public debates with those whose pressing need it is to woo and to win the approval of supernatural beings. Very often, when I give my view that there is no supernatural dimension, and certainly not one that is only or especially available to the faithful, and that the natural world is wonderful enough—and even miraculous enough if you insist—I attract pitying looks and anxious questions. How, in that case, I am asked, do I find meaning and purpose in life? How does a mere and gross materialist, with no expectation of a life to come, decide what, if anything, is worth caring about?"

Depending on my mood, I sometimes but not always refrain from pointing out what a breathtakingly insulting and patronizing question this is. (It is on a par with the equally subtle inquiry: Since you don't believe in our god, what stops you from stealing and lying and raping and killing to your heart's content?) Just as the answer to the latter question is: self-respect and the desire for the respect of others—while in the meantime it is precisely those who think they have divine permission who are truly capable of any atrocity—so the answer to the first question falls into two parts. A life that partakes even a little of friendship, love, irony, humor, parenthood, literature, and music, and the chance to take part in battles for the liberation of others cannot be called 'meaningless' except if the person living it is also an existentialist and elects to call it so. It could be that all existence is a pointless joke, but it is not in fact possible to live one's everyday life as if this were so. Whereas if one sought to define meaninglessness and futility, the idea that a human life should be expended in the guilty, fearful, self-obsessed propitiation of supernatural nonentities... but there, there. Enough."

— Christopher Hitchens, [Hitch-22: A Memoir](#)

"Many religions now come before us with ingratiating smirks and outspread hands, like an unctuous merchant in a bazaar. They offer consolation and solidarity and uplift, competing as they do in a marketplace. But we have a right to remember how barbarically they behaved when they were strong and were making an offer that people could not refuse."

— Christopher Hitchens, [god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything](#)

"[MT](#) [Mother Teresa] was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of *poverty*. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a livestock version of compulsory reproduction."

— Christopher Hitchens

"I suppose that one reason I have always detested religion is its sly tendency to insinuate the idea that the universe is designed with 'you' in mind or, even worse, that there is a divine plan into which one fits whether one knows it or not. This kind of modesty is too arrogant for me."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason. We may differ on many things, but what we respect is free inquiry, openmindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything***

"The Bible may, indeed does, contain a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything***

"My own opinion is enough for me, and I claim the right to have it defended against any consensus, any majority, anywhere, any place, any time. And anyone who disagrees with this can pick a number, get in line, and kiss my ass."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"[Said during a debate when his opponent asserted that atheism and belief in evolution lead to Nazism:]

Atheism by itself is, of course, not a moral position or a political one of any kind; it simply is the refusal to believe in a supernatural dimension. For you to say of Nazism that it was the implementation of the work of [Charles Darwin](#) is a filthy slander, undeserving of you and an insult to this audience. [Darwin](#)'s thought was not taught in Germany; [Darwinism](#) was so derided in Germany along with every other form of unbelief that all the great modern atheists, [Darwin](#), [Einstein](#) and [Freud](#) were alike despised by the National Socialist regime.

Now, just to take the most notorious of the 20th century totalitarianisms – the most finished example, the most perfected one, the most ruthless and refined one: that of National Socialism, the one that fortunately allowed the escape of all these great atheists, thinkers and many others, to the United States, a country of separation of church and state, that gave them welcome – if it's an atheistic regime, then how come that in the first chapter of *Mein Kampf*, that [Hitler](#) says that he's doing God's work and executing God's will in destroying the Jewish people? How come the fuhrer oath that every officer of the Party and the Army had to take, making [Hitler](#) into a minor god, begins, "I swear in the name of almighty God, my loyalty to the Fuhrer?" How come that on the belt buckle of every Nazi soldier it says Gott mit uns, God on our side? How come that the first treaty made by the Nationalist Socialist dictatorship, the very first is with the Vatican? It's exchanging political control of Germany for Catholic control of German education. How come that the church has celebrated the birthday of the Fuhrer every year, on that day until democracy put an end to this filthy, quasi-religious, superstitious, barbarous, reactionary system?

Again, this is not a difference of emphasis between us. To suggest that there's something fascistic about me and about my beliefs is something I won't hear said and you shouldn't believe."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"How dismal it is to see present day Americans yearning for the very orthodoxy that their country was founded to escape."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"To the dumb question 'Why me?' the cosmos barely bothers to return the reply: why not?"

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Mortality***

"To be the father of growing daughters is to understand something of what Yeats evokes with his imperishable phrase 'terrible beauty.' Nothing can make one so happily exhilarated or so frightened: it's a solid lesson in the limitations of self to realize that your heart is running around inside someone else's body. It also makes me quite astonishingly calm at the thought of death: I know whom I would die to protect and I also understand that nobody but a lugubrious serf can possibly wish for a father who never goes away."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"Alcohol makes other people less tedious, and food less bland, and can help provide what the Greeks called *entheos*, or the slight buzz of inspiration when reading or writing. The only worthwhile miracle in the New Testament—the transmutation of water into wine during the wedding at Cana—is a tribute to the persistence of Hellenism in an otherwise austere Judaea. The same applies to the seder at Passover, which is obviously modeled on the Platonic symposium: questions are asked (especially of the young) while wine is circulated. No better form of sodality has ever been devised: at Oxford one was positively expected to take wine during tutorials. The tongue must be untied. It's not a coincidence that Omar Khayyam, rebuking and ridiculing the stone-faced Iranian mullahs of his time, pointed to the value of the grape as a mockery of their joyless and sterile regime. Visiting today's Iran, I was delighted to find that citizens made a point of defying the clerical ban on booze, keeping it in their homes for visitors even if they didn't particularly take to it themselves, and bootlegging it with great *brio* and ingenuity. These small revolutions affirm the human."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"You should be nicer to him,' a schoolmate had once said to me of some awfully ill-favored boy. 'He has no friends.' This, I realized with a pang of pity that I can still remember, was only true as long as everybody agreed to it."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"The man who prays is the one who thinks that god has arranged matters all wrong, but who also thinks that he can instruct god how to put them right."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Mortality***

"*Who are your favorite heroines in real life?* The women of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran who risk their lives and their beauty to defy the foulness of theocracy. Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Azar Nafisi as their ideal feminine model."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"I have always found it quaint and rather touching that there is a movement [Libertarians] in the US that thinks Americans are not yet selfish enough."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind and—since there is no other metaphor—also the soul."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"I once spoke to someone who had survived the genocide in Rwanda, and she said to me that there was now nobody left on the face of the earth, either friend or relative, *who knew who she was*. No one who remembered her girlhood and her early mischief and family lore; no sibling or boon companion who could tease her about that first romance; no lover or pal with whom to reminisce. All her birthdays, exam results, illnesses, friendships, kinships—gone. She went on living, but with a *tabula rasa* as her diary and calendar and notebook. I think of this every time I hear of the callow ambition to 'make a new start' or to be 'born again': Do those who talk this way truly wish for the slate to be wiped? Genocide means not just mass killing, to the level of extermination, but mass obliteration to the verge of extinction. You wish to have one more reflection on what it is to have been made the object of a 'clean' sweep? Try Vladimir Nabokov's microcosmic miniature story 'Signs and Symbols,' which is about angst and misery in general but also succeeds in placing it in what might be termed a starkly individual perspective. The album of the distraught family contains a faded study of Aunt Rosa, a fussy, angular, wild-eyed old lady, who had lived in a tremulous world of bad news, bankruptcies, train accidents, cancerous growths—until the Germans put her to death, together with all the people she had worried about."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"I became a journalist because I did not want to rely on newspapers for information."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"*The quality you most admire in a man?* Courage moral and physical: 'anima'—the ability to think like a woman. Also a sense of the absurd.

The quality you most admire in a woman? Courage moral and physical: "anima"—the ability to visualize the mind and need of a man. Also a sense of the absurd."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"I have met some highly intelligent believers, but history has no record to say that [s]he knew or understood the mind of god. Yet this is precisely the qualification which the godly must claim—so modestly and so humbly—to possess. It is time to withdraw our 'respect' from such fantastic claims, all of them aimed at the exertion of power over other humans in the real and material world."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever***

"Actually—and this was where I began to feel seriously uncomfortable—some such divine claim underlay not just 'the occupation' but the whole idea of a separate state for Jews in Palestine. Take away the divine warrant for the Holy Land and where were you, and what were you? Just another land-thief like the Turks or the British, except that in this case you wanted the land without the people. And the original Zionist slogan—'a land without a people for a people without a land'—disclosed its own negation when I saw the densely populated Arab towns dwelling sullenly under Jewish tutelage. You want irony? How about Jews becoming colonizers at just the moment when other Europeans had given up on the idea?"

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"God did not create man in his own image. Evidently, it was quite the other way about, which is the painless explanation for the profusion of gods and religions, and the fratricide both between and among faiths, that we see all about us and that has so retarded the development of civilization."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything***

"My own view is that this planet is used as a penal colony, lunatic asylum and dumping ground by a superior civilization, to get rid of the undesirable and unfit. I can't prove it, but you can't disprove it either."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything***

"I am not even an atheist so much as an antitheist; I not only maintain that all religions are versions of the same untruth, but I hold that the influence of churches and the effect of religious belief, is positively harmful. Reviewing the false claims of religion I do not wish, as some sentimental materialists affect to wish, that they were true. I do not envy believers their faith. I am relieved to think that the whole story is a sinister fairy tale; life would be miserable if what the faithful affirmed was actually true.... There may be people who wish to live their lives under cradle-to-grave divine supervision, a permanent surveillance and monitoring. But I cannot imagine anything more horrible or grotesque."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"Everything about Christianity is contained in the pathetic image of 'the flock.'"

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"When the *Washington Post* telephoned me at home on Valentine's Day 1989 to ask my opinion about the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwah*, I felt at once that here was something that completely committed me. It was, if I can phrase it like this, a matter of everything I hated versus everything I loved. In the hate column: dictatorship, religion, stupidity, demagoguery, censorship, bullying, and intimidation. In the love column: literature, irony, humor, the individual, and the defense of free expression. Plus, of course, friendship—though I like to think that my reaction would have been the same if I hadn't known Salman at all. To re-state the premise of the argument again: the theocratic head of a foreign despotism offers money in his own name in order to suborn the murder of a civilian citizen of another country, for the offense of writing a work of fiction. No more root-and-branch challenge to the values of the Enlightenment (on the bicentennial of the fall of the Bastille) or to the First Amendment to the Constitution, could be imagined. President George H.W. Bush, when asked to comment, could only say grudgingly that, as far as he could see, no American interests were involved..."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"When the late Pope John Paul II decided to place the woman so strangely known as "["Mother" Teresa](#) on the fast track for beatification, and thus to qualify her for eventual sainthood, the Vatican felt obliged to solicit my testimony and I thus spent several hours in a closed hearing room with a priest, a deacon, and a monsignor, no doubt making their day as I told off, as from a rosary, the frightful faults and crimes of the departed fanatic. In the course of this, I discovered that the pope during his tenure had surreptitiously abolished the famous office of "Devil's Advocate," in order to fast-track still more of his many candidates for canonization. I can thus claim to be the only living person to have represented the Devil *pro bono*."

— **Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir***

"Never be a spectator of unfairness or stupidity. The grave will supply plenty of time for silence."

— **Christopher Hitchens**

"Even if it were possible to cast my horoscope in this one life, and to make an accurate prediction about my future, it would not be possible to 'show' it to me because as soon as I saw it my future would change by definition. This is why Werner Heisenberg's adaptation of the Hays Office—the so-called principle of uncertainty whereby the act of measuring something has the effect of altering the measurement—is of such importance. In my case the difference is often made by publicity. For example, and to boast of one of my few virtues, I used to derive pleasure from giving my time to bright young people who showed promise as writers and who asked for my help. Then some profile of me quoted someone who disclosed that I liked to do this. Then it became something widely said of me, whereupon it became almost impossible for me to go on doing it, because I started to

receive far more requests than I could respond to, let alone satisfy. Perception modifies reality: when I abandoned the smoking habit of more than three decades I was given a supposedly helpful pill called Wellbutrin. But as soon as I discovered that this was the brand name for an antidepressant, I tossed the bottle away. There may be successful methods for overcoming the blues but for me they cannot include a capsule that says: 'Fool yourself into happiness, while pretending not to do so.' I should actually *want* my mind to be strong enough to circumvent such a trick."

— [Christopher Hitchens, Hitch-22: A Memoir](#)

"Why do humans exist? A major part of the answer: because *Pikaia Gracilens* survived the Burgess decimation."

— [Christopher Hitchens, god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything](#)

"The search for Nirvana, like the search for Utopia or the end of history or the classless society, is ultimately a futile and dangerous one. It involves, if it does not necessitate, the sleep of reason. There is no escape from anxiety and struggle."

— [Christopher Hitchens, Love, Poverty, and War: Journeys and Essays](#)

"And here is the point, about myself and my co-thinkers. Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason. We may differ on many things, but what we respect is free inquiry, openmindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake."

— [Christopher Hitchens, god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything](#)

"The clear awareness of having been born into a losing struggle need not lead one into despair. I do not especially *like* the idea that one day I shall be tapped on the shoulder and informed, not that the party is over but that it is most assuredly going on—only henceforth in my absence. (It's the second of those thoughts: the edition of the newspaper that will come out on the day after I have gone, that is the more distressing.) Much more horrible, though, would be the announcement that the party was continuing forever, and that I was forbidden to leave. Whether it was a hellishly bad party or a party that was perfectly heavenly in every respect, the moment that it became eternal and compulsory would be the precise moment that it began to pall."

— [Christopher Hitchens, Hitch-22: A Memoir](#)